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The Symbolism of Continuity and Change

Narendra Modi

It is now well-discussed that the spoken language is only one means of communication. At the beginning of the 1970s, an American anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, published several works dedicated to this thesis. In them, he revealed how people communicate with each other using words simultaneously with other means of expression, and also without the use of words at all. According to him,

when people talk they are using arbitrary vocal symbols to describe something that has happened or might have happened and that there is no necessary connection between these symbolizations and what occurred. Talking is a highly selective process because of the way in which culture works.¹

After that conclusion, Hall provides an example of a politician giving a speech and not achieving the desired result. The reasons for the rhetorical failure Hall describes as follows:

A political figure makes a speech which is supposed to be reassuring. It has the opposite effect. When the words are read *they* are reassuring. Yet the total message as delivered is not. Why? (...) Sentences can be meaningless by themselves. Other signs might be much more eloquent.²

This article aims to describe the main means of communication employed by an Indian right-wing politician, Narendra Modi,³ a leading figure of the Bharatiya Janata

¹ E.T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, New York 1969, p. 93.

² Ibidem, p. 94.

³ A short bio-data given at the end of the article.

Party (BJP) and, at the present moment (April/May 2014), frequently described – in the Indian as well as foreign media – as the Indian Prime Minister-to-be. It also attempts to show the consistency in his political appearance as well as his ability to act as a person who is all for modernity and progress and, at the same time, someone who remains true to tradition through appealing to a set of core values that can be regarded as “Indian” or national.⁴ The analysis carried out in this article will begin with those means of visual expression. Later on, the message as conveyed in language will be discussed. To pursue this line of argument references will be made to both Western (modern) and Indian (ancient) theoretical works related to the subject.

The most famous Indian treatise dedicated to the art of theatre, *Nāṭyaśāstra*,⁵ tells its reader that “when different occasions or times present themselves, wise people should make different uses of the hand gestures.”⁶ According to *Nāṭyaśāstra* “These movements of hands should at the time of their use, be embellished by means of [suitable] expressions in the eyes, the eyebrows and the face,”⁷ and also that “The experts are to use the hand gestures according to the popular practice and, [in this matter] they should have an eye to their movement, object, sphere, quantity, appropriateness and mode.”⁸ Of course, the quoted ancient treatise is a famous work devoted to the art of theatre performance. However, there seems to be very little difference between the actions of a stage actor and the actions of any public speaker. Both are there to convince their audiences of a reality which they try to project in front of their eyes.

One means of communication used by any public figure is most certainly language. Yet, to be convincing, the speaker needs to address not only the sense of hearing, but also other senses of the public. The obvious way of supporting the words pronounced in any public speech would be a set of gestures and expressions, so, in other words, a choreography, as well as the setting and colours of the stage from which a speech is made, and the speaker’s general attire. All that, taken together,

⁴ One could perhaps dwell on the use of the word “national” in this particular context. It would be easy to define it politically, as the Republic of India is determined by its borders and her citizens are all named Indians. However, the problem begins as soon as one looks at the same area of the world from the point of view of its culture(s). For in the cultural context it can be quite easy to notice that in the public discourse of the BJP, both “national” and “Indian” might simply mean “Hindu”. Therefore, it is only politically that both these terms cover all the citizens of the Republic of India. Any other division first of all excludes (even if only indirectly) the culturally different Indian Muslim population. It is also worth noting, that in modern-day Indian politics, there is not one important political formation that would represent the interests of the Muslims, just as the BJP – out of definition and in practice – represents the interests of the Hindus.

⁵ The work on the theory of stage performance (dance, music, theatre) is attributed to a legendary author by the name of Bharata, and written in Sanskrit. It is supposed to have been composed between 200 BC and 200 AD.

⁶ *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*, trans. M. Ghosh, Calcutta 1951, p. 186.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 185.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 186.

might be referred to as scenography and costume, which brings any political speech close to a theatrical performance.

Narendra Modi Seen

First of all, it will be worth observing how Narendra Modi appears specifically to the public eye. One illustrative example shows the politician in question speaking from an open lotus flower (cf. picture 10). What can the audience read from such an image, even before the words are spoken? Most certainly, not only that the lotus flower is an emblem of the Bharatiya Janata Party⁹ which Modi represents, but most of the people brought up in Indian (not only Hindu) culture would directly denote several additional meanings from seeing this particular symbol.

Heinrich Zimmer, in his classic study *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* categorizes the lotus as the symbol of Brahma, of the goddess Kali, the goddess Lakshmi, the Buddhist symbol of Nirvana etc. The same scholar also assigns the lotus different connotations regarding the function it performs; therefore, he discusses separately the lotus growing from cosmic waters, growing from the navel of the god Vishnu, the lotus in pre-Aryan times, the lotus personified as Mother Goddess, etc.¹⁰ Moreover, the lotus is a symbol used by all the main religions that originated in the Subcontinent. It is filled with meanings for the Hindus, the Jains, and the Buddhists. And even for the Muslims, it became a popular design used in arabesque decorations. Zimmer opens the chapter dedicated to *Lotus* with the following words:

When the divine life substance is about to put forth the universe, the cosmic waters grow a thousand-petaled lotus of pure gold, radiant as the sun. This is a door or gate, the opening or mouth, of the womb of the universe. It is the first product of the creative principle, gold in token of its incorruptible nature. It opens to give birth first to the demiurge-creator, Brahma.¹¹

Since no one can trace anyone else's associations, it is only possible to state that in this particular case, the PR specialists of this particular politician have done their best to create a powerful message.¹² And this way of appealing to a certain, carefully

⁹ More on the subject, see: R. Czekalska, "Rower, lew i gwiazda..., czyli o niektórych aspektach wyborów parlamentarnych w Indiach" (The Bicycle, the Lion and the Star..., or on Some Aspects of the Indian Parliamentary Elections), [in:] *Teoretyczne i praktyczne problemy kultury politycznej. Studia i szkice*. (Theoretical and Practical Problems of Political Culture. Studies and Sketches), M. Banaś [ed.], Kraków 2013 (Societas 67), pp. 241-256.

¹⁰ See: H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, J. Campbell [ed.], Princeton 1972 (Bollingen Series 6), p. 5, 17, 52, 61, 90, 91, 92, 96, 97, 98, 100, 214.

¹¹ *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni...*, p. 90.

¹² The credit of Modi's successful image can be ascribed to the man himself, since he completed a three-month course in the US on public relations and image management. Cf. [on line]

chosen set of associations, seems to be the basis of Narendra Modi's election campaign. In his public appearances, as well as in the advertisement photographs and posters, the BJP leader's general attire never seems without significance.

For example, the carefully trimmed beard has already become almost his trademark. The afore mentioned *Nātyaśāstra* brings a description of four kinds of beard: "shaven (*śuddha*), black (*śyāma*), smartly done (*vicitra*) and bushy (*romaśa* lit. hairy)."¹³ Later on, the text ascribes the four types to certain kinds of men. "The beards of celestial males (...), kings, princes, officers of the king and persons who are foppish and proud of their youth, should be made smartly done (*vicitra*)..."¹⁴

At this point, it might be worth noting that a tidy and neatly trimmed stubble follows at the same time the fashion present nowadays among the young men of the so-called West. In the same way, the cut of Narendra Modi's short-sleeve *kurtā* seems to be in itself a mix of modernity and tradition.¹⁵ Besides, Modi – as it can be observed during his visits abroad – appears to feel equally comfortable wearing Western clothes.

Similarly, the set of colours always present on and around Modi is not randomly chosen. Once again let us refer to the valuable text of the *Nātyaśāstra*.

The four original (lit. natural) colours are black, blue, yellow and red. (...) There are besides these, the primary and the secondary derivative colours. (...) Just as [the soul of] a man on entering the body of another being, renounces his own nature connected with a different body and assumes another character, so a person having (...) [a different] colour and Costume adopts the behaviour connected with the clothes he will wear.¹⁶

Soma (the Moon), Bṛhaspati, Śukra, Varuṇa, and the stars, the ocean, the Himālaya, and Gaṅgā (the Ganges) are to be made white in colour.(...) Kings (...) should be of lotus colour, or dark blue or reddish yellow (...). And the happy mortals (...) are to be made of the reddish yellow (...) colour.¹⁷

The text of the *Nātyaśāstra* leaves little freedom to the make-up artists, stage designers and PR specialists, stating that "out of necessity and not according to one's pleasure, colours of persons may be varied."¹⁸ And a closer look at the colours of Narendra Modi's clothes proves that his choices are not accidental. They seem to

<http://www.niticentral.com/2013/09/17/8-facts-about-narendra-modi-133858.html>, April 25, 2014.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 426.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 427.

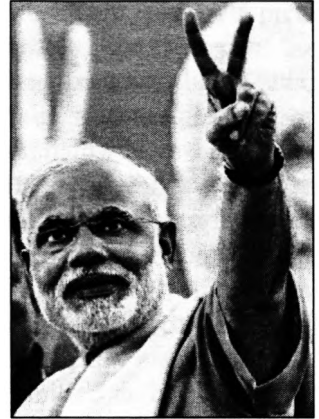
¹⁵ According to Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, the author of Narendra Modi's biography (*Narendra Modi. The Man. The Times*, 2013), "Modi has borrowed his half-sleeved knee-length kurta style from yesteryears Bollywood superstar Rajesh Khanna", [on line] <http://www.newkerala.com/news/2014/fullnews-24257.html#.U0ux9leeakG>, April 14, 2014.

¹⁶ *The Nātyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni...*, p. 422.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 423.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

follow the set of hues associated with positive qualities, such as power, wealth, strength, joy, etc. For these are the colours worn by powerful persons, gods and kings, and also the colours that – according to *Nāṭyaśāstra* – are supposed to depict certain emotional moods (*rasa*¹⁹). In the case of this particular politician, the prevailing colours would be light orange,²⁰ yellow and white,²¹ (cf. pictures 8-9) meaning respectively the *rasa* of heroism, marvel and humour, as according to the ancient treatise, “(...) the Comic Sentiment [is] white (...), the Heroic [Sentiment] light orange (*gaura*), the Marvellous [Sentiment] yellow”.²²



1. Narendra Modi's V-sign.
Source: [on line] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2251293/Modi-scores emphatic-win-Gujarat-crowds-chant-PM-PM--BJP-keeps-silence-march-Centre.html>, May 2, 2014

However, the three colours of the three *rasa* together with the colours attributed by the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to certain kinds of men, at the same time bring associations that are surely not limited to Indian tradition. Universally they are acknowledged as the colours of optimism and cheerfulness (especially orange and yellow), the colour of success, achievement and triumph, prestige and material wealth (gold), the colour of purity, innocence, wholeness and completion (white). Read one way or the other, the message definitely creates a positive vibration.

The next mode through which any public speaker appeals to the audience is gesture. Narendra Modi uses his hands in an emphatic manner; his gestures therefore “speak” clearly, communicating confidence and authority. Moreover, since in his choice he does not seem to follow one particular system, the chosen hand gestures seem to be originally ascribed to him. Among them the most often used are the following:

¹⁹ *Rasa* – according to *Nāṭyaśāstra*: “The eight Sentiments (*rasa*) recognised in drama are as follows: Erotic (...), Comic (...), Pathetic (...), Furious (...), Heroic (...), Terrible (...), Odious (...) and Marvellous (...).” (p. 101) The sentiments (*rasa*) are the results of states (*bhāva*), since “There can be no Sentiment prior to (lit. without) the States and no States without the Sentiments [following it] (...) Just as a combination of spices and vegetables imparts good taste to the food cooked, so the States and the Sentiments cause one another...,” see: *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*..., p. 107.

²⁰ *Gaura* – lit. ‘the colour of the cow’.

²¹ *Sita* – lit. ‘the colour of the Moon’.

²² *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*..., pp. 107-108. A simple test of opening entry “Narendra Modi” in Google Images will prove this observations, as the computer screen immediately becomes orangy-gold, with little accents of white and some touches of green.

The V-sign

This widely adopted gesture (cf. picture 1) has become a universally recognizable symbol of peace, though it has various meanings in different cultures that result also from the way in which it is presented. The most common interpretation comes from reading it as a representation of the letter 'V' as in the word 'victory'. The apparently legendary story traces the origin of this symbol to medieval conflict between the French and the English. According to the legend, the French were to cut off the index and middle right-hand fingers of the captured English bowmen to make them unable to shoot arrows. The gesture by which the English showed the enemy that they still had the fingers was therefore also a sign of insolence.

In the Indian tradition it doesn't seem to project such a clear, single message.²³ Among the twenty-four gestures that can be performed with a single hand, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists a gesture called *kartarīmukha*²⁴:

Kartarīmukha (scissors' blades) (...) With fingers pointing upwards it will represent biting, horn and letters. And when the fingers in it are turned differently (i.e. the middle finger is bent backward) it will represent falling down, death, transgression, reversion, cogitation and putting [anything] in trust.²⁵

In the case of a politician who is self-confident and successful (at least at the time of the election campaign) the use of the V-sign is quite clearly the generally acknowledged sign of victory. Besides, in a culture with a long tradition of gesture-language, it might speak even more powerfully.

The right hand up

The simple gesture of waving the right hand is the world-common way to say "hello". Its origins are apparently set in times long past, when it was a way to show that our hands were empty and that we meant no harm to those that we approached. Therefore it was, and it remains, a gesture of kindness and friendliness. And, like the V-sign, it seems to be generally acknowledged and understood. However, the tiara (cf. picture 2) – head-



2. Modi greets the audience with the right hand up.

Source: [on line] <http://nimg.sulekha.com/others/thumbnailfull/narendra-modi-2009-4-12-10-50-41.jpg>, May 2, 2014

²³ Especially because in neither of the native scripts used on the Indian Subcontinent is there a sign that would in its shape resemble the Latin "v".

²⁴ *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*..., p. 170.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 173.

²⁶ [on line] <http://nimg.sulekha.com/others/thumbnailfull/narendra-modi-2009-4-12-10-50-41.jpg>, May 2, 2014.

wear of the Hindu gods – induces one to find in this gesture connotations typical for an open right palm (even though it is not exactly a *patāka* sign as used in the *abhaya* – lit. “free of fear” – a gesture typical for the impersonations of some Hindu gods and also the Buddha), directed at the viewer and suggesting peaceful intentions and protection.

Perhaps most interesting is the fact that next to that internationally employed “hello” gesture, Narendra Modi uses the typical Indian greeting signs with equal ease. These are the following (described in point “C”).

The *añjali*

In the photograph (cf. picture 3) we see Narendra Modi performing very much an Indian gesture. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* it is named *añjali* – and described as “putting together the two *Patāka* hands.”²⁷

It is used to greet gods, venerable persons (*guru*) and friends. (...) In greeting gods it is to be held on the head, in case of venerable persons it is to be held near one’s face, and for greeting friends it is to be placed on the breast, and in case of the remaining persons there is no fixed rule.²⁸



3. Modi greeting the audience with the *añjali*.

Source: [on line] <http://img.wallpapergang.com/175processed/narendra%20modi%20Wallpapers.jpg>. May 2, 2014



4. Modi ‘saying’ *namaskār* gesture.

Source: [on line] http://www.bangladeshchronicle.net/index.php/2014/03/modi-worrying-signs-of-a-one-man-show/m_id_376117_narendra_modi. May 2, 2014

In one of its forms, *añjali* is used as a customary greeting when individuals meet, and as a farewell gesture when they part. The greeting (*namaskār* or *namaste*) is carried out with a slight bow and hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointing upwards (cf. picture 4). It is used as a respectful form of greeting, acknowledging and welcoming a relative, guest or stranger.

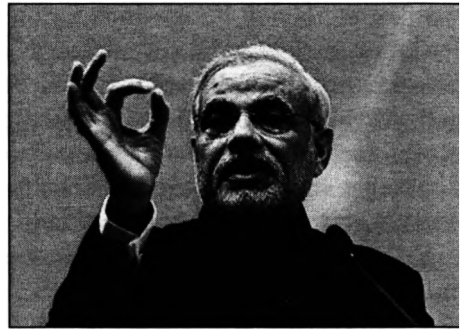
²⁷ *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni*.... p. 182.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

The OK sign

In our times the gesture (cf. picture 5) is associated mainly with the American culture; in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* it bears the name *arāla* and is described as follows:

Arāla (bent) – the forefinger curved like a bow, the thumb also curved and remaining fingers separated and turned upwards. (...) With this should be represented courage, pride, prowess, beauty, contentment, heavenly [objects], poise, act of blessing and other favourable states.²⁹



5. Modi's OK sign.

Source: [on line] http://s3.firstpost.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/NarendraModi_Reuters_1_March-1.jpg, May 2, 2014

In this case the different cultures seem to speak univocally, even though in some places of the world this gesture can also be incredibly rude; however, as such it is perhaps not so very much used in public political discourse.

The pointing out index finger

The gesture is universally used by people who are quite confident about their stature and authority – teachers, parents, spiritual leaders, and some politicians (cf. picture 6). Especially these who know they are right for the simple reason that everyone else must be wrong. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra* the gesture is named *sūcimukha*.

Bharata, the legendary author of this ancient treatise, describes it in the following words:

I shall tell you briefly of its various uses as the forefinger [in it] is raised and bent moving sideways, shaking, moving up and down and moving without any rest (...) to represent pride, 'I am', enemy, 'Who is this' (...).³⁰



6. Finger-pointing Narendra Modi.

Source: [on line] <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/lok-sabha-election-2014-rahul-gandhi-narendra-modi-arvind-kejriwal/1/351348.html>, May 2 2014

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 174.

³⁰ *The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed to Bharata-Muni...*, pp. 176-177.

Patience... pride... elegance...

“The left hand holding the [right] arm above the elbow and the right hand similarly touching the left arm with a clenched fist will make a *Niṣadha* hand”, says the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (cf. picture 11). And continues:

It is to indicate patience, intoxication, pride, elegance, eagerness, valour, arrogance, self-conceit, haughtiness, motionlessness, steadiness and the like.³¹

The gestures described above are of course only a few of Narendra Modi's original repertoire; however, they seem to be both the most characteristic and the most frequently repeated. Through them he has been able to convince a large public to give consequence to his political persona, and to catch the attention of the crowds. Some of the signs, like the described V-sign, or his hand on his forehead (the thinking man), the clenched fist etc. – are all indications of being assertive, strong-willed and determined. The message created by the gestures is simple and clear. Moreover, in Narendra Modi's case, the words spoken and the hand gestures seem to go hand in hand.

Narendra Modi Heard

The speech delivered by Narendra Modi on 19 January 2014, during the BJP National Council Meeting held in Delhi,³² provides almost a model of electoral rhetoric typical of the “saffron strategy” of the Bharatiya Janata Party, following its permanent and favourite persuasive scheme: 1) recalling of the magnificent tradition of the great, ancient (and – apparently – Hindu) India; 2) pungent criticism of Indian politicians who, after achieving independence in 1947, “lost the spirit and the vision,” and of the several decades of “weak and spineless leadership”, provided by the Congress Party (BJP's main political opponent), which resulted in serious political, economic and social problems afflicting the country; 3) exposition of the BJP's abilities contrasted with the latter and presenting its own ideas for resolving the most urgent problems of the nation.³³ But this hour-long show of oratory art is at the same time a typical “Modi-speech”, with which he has harangued audiences during his peculiar hundred plus “*Bhārat Vijay*” (“Victory for India”) rallies organised in this election season. Modi's speeches are constructed in a characteristic way, starting with his trademark UPA³⁴ bashing and ending with a vision for an India that can collectively empower

³¹ Ibidem, p. 183.

³² [on line] <http://www.narendramodi.in/full-speech-shri-narendra-modi-at-the-bjp-national-council-meet-delhi/>, April 20, 2014.

³³ Such a reasoning may be found in many BJP's programme and electoral texts, cf. e.g. BJP Election Manifesto 2014, [on line] <http://bjpelectionmanifesto.com/hindi/pdf/manifesto2014.pdf>, April 23, 2014.

³⁴ United Progressive Alliance, a Congress-led coalition of centre-left political parties formed after the 2004 general election. The current (April 2014) Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, and the Council of Ministers are drawn from members of the UPA.

all of her 1.27 billion citizens. As already described, they are visually supported by a rich and meaningful scenic design. But above all, they are loaded with slogans, sayings and alliterative one-liners based on skilful use of metaphors and collective symbols.

The choice of language of Narendra Modi's speeches and its register can be seen as a symbolic phenomenon. Although his mother tongue is Gujarati – as was formerly the case of other great Indian politicians, with Gandhi and Jinnah in the first row – and even though he can communicate well in English³⁵, Narendra Modi has chosen Hindi, one of the two official languages of the Indian Union Government, as the language of his electoral campaign. And contrary to his famous predecessors, who had to have their speeches written by Hindi (or Urdu, in the case of Jinnah) language experts and were only able to perform what had been prepared for them in writing, Modi seems to feel completely comfortable with Hindi and gives his speeches, as well as interviews in this language with ease and fluency. Although the BJP does not officially declare any special position for Hindi against other Indian languages and dialects³⁶, it is obviously perceived and ideologically promoted – especially in the heartland – as a bearer of Hindu identity.³⁷ The “Hindi belt”³⁸ substantially coincides with the “Hindu belt”³⁹, the region that plays a central role in the religious landscape of the Hindus and at the same time covers three states with the largest population in the country (in total, nearly 400 million people, according to the 2011 census,⁴⁰ i.e. approx. 30% of the entire population of India). Therefore, for any ambitious politician aspiring for the highest offices in the country, the choice of Hindi would be quite natural, if only for pragmatic reasons. And for a “Hindu nationalist” politician, like Modi, it bears also an undeniable ideological dimension.

³⁵ However, it is a rare treat to see Narendra Modi deliver an entire speech extemporaneously in English. Cf. Sh. Shekhar, “The Story of Mission272+ as seen through Narendra Modi's Speeches”, *Niti Central*, Mar. 3, 2014, [on line] <http://www.niticentral.com/2014/03/03/the-story-of-mission272-as-seen-through-narendra-modis-speeches-195545.html>, April 26, 2014.

³⁶ Cf.: “Indian Languages are repositories of our rich literature, history, culture, art and scientific achievements. Many of our dialects are important source for knowing our heritage. BJP would promote Indian languages, and put measures for the development of all Indian languages, so that they become a powerful vehicle for creating a knowledge society.” BJP Election Manifesto 2014, p. 41, [on line] <http://bjpelectionmanifesto.com/hindi/pdf/manifesto2014.pdf>, April 23, 2014.

³⁷ Cf. e.g. A. Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, New Delhi 2007 (Tracts for the Time, 13), p. 71-72 and passim.

³⁸ The “Hindi Belt”, or “Hindi heartland”, is a loosely defined linguistic region in North and Central India where varieties of Hindi in the broadest sense are widely spoken, either as primary or secondary languages. Cf. A. Kuczkiewicz-Fraś, *Perso-Arabic Loanwords in Hindustani. Part II. Linguistic Study*, Kraków 2012, pp. 5-33.

³⁹ “Hindu Belt”, known also as “Cow Belt”, is the combined area of the Indian States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, which have been most dominant states in Indian politics and culture since Independence.

⁴⁰ “Population, Size and Decadal Change”, [on line] http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/PCA/PCA_Highlights/pca_highlights_file/India/Chapter-1.pdf, April 23, 2014.

Modi is famous for his clever linguistic phrases which he throws at the audience with great ease and emphasis. But the power of his speeches does not depend solely, or even mainly, on such tricks (we will go back to them later in the text). The important thing is, however, that like many other successful politicians, he makes use of a wide range of collective symbols, by means of which he improves his own effectiveness to persuade, or motivate the addressees.

Collective symbols are functional units showing a strong positive or negative marking and – simultaneously – cultural significance. This latter property is understood as part of the semantics of words, going beyond their lexical meaning, forming that part of the meaning, the knowledge of which is one of the conditions of affiliation to a particular culture. Collective symbols not only possess clearly manifested cultural significance, but are also mutually networked, i.e. the semantics of the word is codetermined, complemented and oriented by other words and their semantics.⁴¹

Narendra Modi employs many symbols of this kind. They are probably readable for most Indians, but for the supporters of Hindu nationalist movement, they have special, added semantic value. For example, the symbolic sense of a following (alliterative) statement,

deś ko śāsak nahīm, sevak kī zarūrat hai

The country does not need a ruler, it needs a servant

in which a candidate who wants to govern the country (*śāsak*) is opposed to the one who wants to serve it (*sevak*), obviously refers to his political rival Rahul Gandhi – who has often been described by Modi as a “prince” coming from the “Gandhi dynasty.” However, for Hindu nationalists *sevak* would have a clear and unambiguous (and positive) association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh⁴² – the organization whose self-defined ideology is based on the principle of selfless service to the nation, and which was also the political and ideological cradle of Narendra Modi himself.⁴³ Therefore, the deeper meaning of the slogan becomes clear and convincing for those who can interpret it in this particular way: India needs a *sevak* (= an RSS activist), i.e. India needs Narendra Modi.

⁴¹ M. Fleischer, “Stabilność polskiej symboliki kolektywnej” (Stability of the Polish Collective Symbolism), [in:] idem, *Konstrukcja rzeczywistości* (The Structure of Reality), Wrocław 2002 (Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, 2463).

⁴² Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), ‘National Volunteer Organization’, a right-wing, paramilitary and extremist, volunteer Hindu nationalist group, founded in 1925 as a counterbalance for the nonviolent and tolerant Hinduism represented by Gandhi (who, ultimately, was assassinated in 1948 by a former RSS man).

⁴³ Modi was involved with RSS since the age of eight, first as a child volunteer of the RSS branch (*śakha*) in his Gujarati hometown Vadnagar, and since 1970 as a propagandist (*pracārak*). Cf. V.K. Jose, “The Emperor Uncrowned. The Rise of Narendra Modi”, *The Caravan. A Journal of Politics and Culture*, March 1, 2012, [on line] <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/emperor-uncrowned?page=1,1>, April 28. 2014.

We observe a similar phenomenon when Modi announces one of many differences existing between the Congress and the BJP:

unkī soṇ hai: garībī mānasik avastha hai, hamārī soc hai: garīb hamāre liye daridr nārāyaṇ hain

‘Their thinking is: poverty is a state of mind, our thinking is: for us the poor is godly.’

mocking Rahul Gandhi’s famous remark on poverty⁴⁴ and recalling Swami Vivekananda’s⁴⁵ axiom of “Daridra Nārāyaṇa”, according to which the service to the poor and the service to God are equal in terms of importance and piety. Popularised later by Gandhi, the phrase “Daridra Nārāyaṇa” has become the timeless input of Swami Vivekananda to the religious vocabulary of India.⁴⁶ For Hindu believers the symbolic sense of this dogma is clear: serving the poor is the means of worshiping the Supreme Lord (Nārāyaṇa); thus, it is the means of fulfilling the basic religious duty of a Hindu. The whole range of positive connotations – “God”, “religion”, “unselfishness”, “helping the poor”, etc. – are supposed to evoke friendly and supportive attitude towards a man who admits openly that he follows Vivekananda’s leads (i.e. Narendra Modi).

Yet another collective symbol of this kind, which frames a typical Modi speech, is the *indradhanuṣ* or “the rainbow.” Modi explains his “idea of India” through the seven colours of the rainbow: each colour signifies a concept, or group of concepts, which together make up his coherent and overreaching vision of the future India:

1st colour: *kuṭumb prathā* “family tradition”, *parivār vyavasthā* “family system”;

2nd colour: *kṛṣi* “agriculture”, *paśu* “cattle”, *gāmv* “village”;

3rd colour: *nārī* “woman”, *māṭrk śakti* “maternal strength”;

4th colour: *jal* “water”, *jamīn* “land”, *jāngal* “forest”; *jalvāyu* “climate, air”;

5th colour: *yuvā dhan* “youth capital”, *yuvā śakti* “power of youth”;

6th colour: *loktānta* “democracy”; and

7th colour: *jñān* “knowledge”.

Most of them are collective symbols themselves – terms such as “family”, “cattle”, “maternal (strength)”, etc. in the Hindu mind, evoke associations that go far beyond their basic semantic value, and are rooted deeply in the religious and cultural tradition of Hinduism. However, *indradhanuṣ* “the rainbow”, which Modi used as the framing

⁴⁴ During the public discussion held in Allahabad on 5th August 2013, Rahul Gandhi said: “Poverty is just a state of mind. It does not mean the scarcity of food, money or material things. If one possesses self-confidence, then one can overcome poverty”, [on line] <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/rahul-gandhi-s-poverty-is-a-state-of-mind-remark-draws-flak-402029>, April 28, 2014. The statement evoked widespread outrage and criticism as well as accusations of arrogance and ignorance.

⁴⁵ Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Hindu spiritual leader and reformer who attempted to combine Indian spirituality with Western material progress; credited for introducing Hindu philosophies of Vedānta and Yoga in Europe and America.

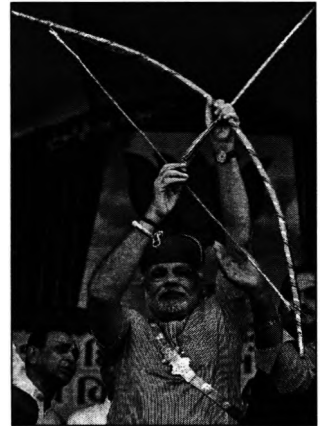
⁴⁶ G.S. Banhatti, *Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, New Delhi 1995, p. 212.

concept for his vision, happens to be an extremely rich symbol in almost all cultures of the world. Generally, the rainbow is a bridging representation that connects the supernatural and natural worlds, usually optimistic. It occurs after the massive destructive flood that according to many mythologies destroyed all living things on earth. In Hindu mythology, during the cosmic *pralaya* ('dissolution'), the rainbow, in the realm of the "upper waters", is a sign of the restoration of the order that is preserved below in the ark. In most cultures it symbolizes, among others, the presence of God, blessing, alliance, consent, forgiveness, mercy, promise, peace, hope, rebirth, resurrection, victory, etc., and also it is a sign of diversity and inclusiveness, of hope and of yearning.⁴⁷ Decoding Modi's 'rainbow vision' in this symbolic context, one reads out the following message: here is a man, who after catastrophe and ruin (decades of bad rule in the country), brings to the nation peace and hope for a brighter future.

His scheme aims at uniting the whole nation, regardless of all the social or political divisions – "unity in diversity", like united are the seven colours in the rainbow.

Yet again, for Hindu nationalists the rainbow, called *indradhanuṣ*, would have special significance. It translates literally as "the bow (*dhanuṣ*) of Indra", (the god of lightning, thunder and rain), but according to some Hindu myths, the rainbow is a weapon of the god Rama, the most important incarnation of Vishnu. A bow, symbolized by the rainbow, is also an emblem of the god Shiva who in the past had intervened with it several times, to re-establish the divine order of the Universe.⁴⁸ On the spiritual level the bow and arrow denote the power of will.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, Narendra Modi uses this prop during his rallies (picture 7).

There is one more aspect of Modi's speeches worth mentioning, namely the quantity and quality of the so-called "banner words" which he uses in his addresses. Banner words are words and phrases which, due to their denotative and connotative but above all their emotive value, are suitable for flags and banners. Polish specialist in the language of politics, Walery Pisarek, divides them into two categories: *miranda* ("what should be admired," positive banner words) and *condemnanda* ("what should be condemned," the negative ones). Both represent different groups of positive and negative values, such as good and evil, truth and lies, beauty and ugliness, wisdom and folly, etc. The values (*miranda* and *condemnanda*) have the status of theoretical



7. Narendra Modi with a bow, during a rally.

Source: [on line] <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?article=777886>, May 2, 2014

⁴⁷ Cf. "Rainbow", [in:] J. Tresidder, *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*, London 2008; J.E. Cirlot, *The Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. J. Sage, London, 2001 (Taylor&Francis e-Library), p. 19; "Tęcza", [in:] W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1991.

⁴⁸ Cf. H. Zimmer, op. cit., p. 186-187.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 204.

reconstruction, while the banner words are their empirical realizations. Each value can be symbolized by several different banner words.⁵⁰

As an experienced orator, Modi makes good use of banner words, especially while opposing his own (or BJP's) ideas to the words and deeds of the Congress. Apart from that, banner words are easily articulated and memorable, and thus can be used as slogans, shouted together by the speaker and the masses during the electoral meetings.

The table below presents the exemplary set of *miranda* and *condemnanda* which can be found in Narendra Modi addresses.

Miranda		Condemnanda
<i>deś</i> "country, nation"	vs.	<i>dal</i> "party"
<i>kāmdār</i> "worker"	vs.	<i>nāmdār</i> "big name man"
<i>cāi vālā</i> "a tea-seller"	vs.	<i>bairisṭar</i> "a lawyer"
<i>pichrī jāti</i> "backward class"	vs.	<i>ucca kul (ke log)</i> "high born"
<i>garīb</i> "the poor"	vs.	<i>amīr</i> "nobleman"
<i>parivardhan</i> "development"	vs.	<i>mahaṅgāi</i> "inflation"
<i>dalit</i> "oppressed"/ <i>pīrit</i> "suffering"	vs.	<i>sāmāntī</i> "feudal"
<i>azādi</i> "freedom"	vs.	<i>uccatā</i> "superiority"/ <i>jātivād</i> "racism"
<i>suśāsan</i> "good governance"	vs.	<i>netṛtvhīn</i> "leaderless"/ <i>durdaśā</i> "bad plight"
<i>pradān</i> "delivery"	vs.	<i>kālā bāzār</i> "black market"/ <i>kālā paisā</i> "black money"
<i>deśātan</i> "tourism"	vs.	<i>ātankvād</i> "terrorism"
<i>bhārat mātā</i> "Mother India"	vs.	Congress
<i>parivartan ka cunāv</i> "elections of change"		
<i>āśā aur armān kā cunāv</i> "elections of hope and aspiration"		
<i>loktāntrīc paramparā</i> "democratic tradition"		
<i>svarāj</i> "sovereignty"/ <i>surāj</i> "home rule"		
<i>majbūt deś</i> "strong country"		
<i>ganatantra</i> "republic"/ <i>guṇatantra</i> "importance of merit"		
<i>sabse pahle bhārat!</i> "first of all – India!"		
<i>bhārat mātā kī jāy!</i> "long live Mother India!"		
Vote for India!		

This is only a sample of banner words used by Modi. There are many more, especially when he shouts slogans such as: *deś kī rakṣā ke liye!* "for protecting the country!", *rahne ko ghar ke liye* "for houses to live!", etc., encouraging the crowd

⁵⁰ W. Pisarek, "Polskie słowa sztandarowe i ich publiczność: lata dziewięćdziesiąte" (Polish Banner Words and Their Publicity: the Nineties), *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 2000, no. 3-4 (163-164).

to shout back: “Vote for India!” We can see that the positive values (*miranda*) far outnumber the negative ones (*condemnanda*). This fact definitely adds an optimistic tone to the speech.

As already mentioned, Narendra Modi is famous for the use of countless oratorical artifices in his speeches, among which the alliterative one-liners seem to be his hallmark. Even though the critics accuse him of putting semantics before substance, there is no doubt that his brief jokes and witty remarks, cleverly constructed in the form of language games, always attract attention, sometimes amuse and surely remain for long in the memory of voters. Many of them aim at criticizing the Congress Party, as in the following example, in which Modi is attacking his main political opponents for their “feudal mindset”, opposing those who live on their big names, like the members of the “Gandhi dynasty” (*nāmdār*), to those who live on their work, like himself, a man coming from a backward caste (*kāmdār*):

ve nāmdār haiṁ aur maiṁ kāmdār hūṁ. aise baṛe nāmdār ek kāmdār se mukābla karnā burā mante haiṁ

‘They are *nāmdār* (big named) and I am a *kāmdār* (worker). Such big names find it insulting to compete with a worker.’

Usually, defects and faults ascribed to the Congress are contrasted with advantages and qualities which are supposed to characterize BJP. Below are several examples:

vahām dal bacāne kī kośīś thī, yahām deś bacāne kī bāt ho rahī hai

‘There, they were trying to **save the party**, whereas here we are struggling to **save the nation**.’

unkī soč hai: samāj ko toṛo aur rāj karo, hamārī soc hai: samāj ko joṛo aur vikās karo

‘Their thinking is: **divide and rule**,⁵¹ our thinking is: **unite the society and develop**.’

unkī soč hai: vaṁśavād, hamārī soc hai: raṣṭravād

‘Their thinking is: **dynastic regime**, our thinking is: **nationalism**.’

unkī soč hai: rājñtī sab kuch hai, hamārī soc hai: raṣṭranṭī sab kuch hai

‘Their thinking is: **politics is everything**, our thinking is: **national policy is everything**.’

Occasionally, Modi slips also into phrases in English, for example:

sirf bill nahīṁ cāhiye, political will cāhiye aur karne ke liye dīl cāhiye

‘Only **bills** will not serve any purpose, now we need **political will** and the **heart** to act.’

⁵¹ In the Indian context “Divide and Rule” strategy has a very strong connotation with colonial times, when it was employed by the imperial powers (mainly British and French) who backed various Indian states in conflicts between each other, both as a means of undermining each other’s influence and consolidating their authority. Ascribing this strategy to Congress, Modi clearly equates its actions with the self-serving management practiced by the colonizers.

hamem committee nahim, hamem committment cāhiye, aur deś ke liye committment cāhiye

‘We do not want **committees** but **commitment**, **commitment** for the country.’

What is significant for Narendra Modi analysed as a public speaker, is the version of Hindi spoken by him, namely the Modern Standard Hindi (or High Hindi, Literary Hindi) – a standardized register of Sanskritized Hindi taught in Hindi language classes in the Republic of India and generally identified with Hindus. Although not his mother tongue, Modi uses it not only fluently, but also with confidence and dignity – the qualities which during his campaign have become a brand new value in Indian politics. Sandip Roy, an Indian-American commentator for New America Media and American NPR observes:

What Modi (...) has done is remove from his speeches that hint of shuffling apology that has often characterized the urban educated Indian’s relationship to Hindi. The days when Indians puffed up with pride at hearing Indira Gandhi’s clipped English at press conferences in Washington DC are fading fast. Atal Bihari Vajpayee⁵² punctured that balloon of false pride by choosing to address the UN in Hindi. Modi, in his speeches, whether in Gujarati at home, or in Hindi outside the state, delivers it a mortal blow.⁵³

Indeed, for a politician who openly and proudly declares himself a Hindu nationalist, the choice of Hindi is the most natural way of announcing and supporting his own political orientation.

On the other hand, Modi does not limit his electoral message to addresses in Hindi, delivered at the rallies and meetings, directly in front of the electorate. With good effect – judging by the number and intensity of posted comments – he uses also modern information media to spread his ideas: many of his speeches, in full or fragments, are easily available on the Internet, and on his official webpage (<http://www.narendramodi.in/speeches/>), one can find, apart from video recordings, transcripts of his most important harangues in Hindi or in English. Moreover, Narendra Modi seems to follow Nelson Mandela’s observation that if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head, but if you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart. Having realized that for a more effective intercommunication with voters in big states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, his speeches need to be in the local language, Modi not only has made his official website multilingual,⁵⁴ but has come out with a set of videos of his

⁵² Atal Bihari Vajpayee – one of the main BJP leaders, in 1998-2004 the Prime Minister of India on behalf of this party.

⁵³ S. Roy, “Modi’s language of choice: A new era of Hindi hegemony?”, *Firstpost. Politics*, October 4, 2013, [on line] <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/modis-language-of-choice-a-new-era-of-hindi-hegemony-1152469.html>, April 26, 2014.

⁵⁴ Modi’s official website is available for reading in twelve regional languages: Assamese, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, and Urdu, and four foreign languages: Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Spanish, along with English. Apart from that, he also has twitter handles in regional languages. Noteworthy is the

speeches dubbed by professionals who try to perfectly copy his voice and style of speaking.

Modi's oratory captivates the audience and nowadays many a commentator see him as the most effective public speaker on the Indian political scene. He speaks correct and unsophisticated Hindi, easy to understand by the Hindi-speaking masses. English words and phrases appear, but not very often – Anglicisms used by him are always single terms, technical or political, and very often they occur interchangeably with their Hindi (sometimes highly Sanskritized) equivalents. For example, one of his flagship ideas, "good governance," which he pledges to enter into force if BJP wins the election, is interchangeably expressed by the English term or by its Sanskritized Hindi counterpart *suśāsan*, with the considerable favour of the latter. He also replaces several other commonly understood English words with their Hindi equivalents, and definitely prefers to say *cunāv* for "elections", *rājnītik* for "political", *loktāntrik* for "democratic", *pradhān mantrī* for "Prime Minister", *netā* for "leader", *saṅghīy* for "federal", *gaṇatantra* for "republic", *śvetakrānti* for "white revolution", etc.

Of course, avoiding English terminology entails the necessity of finding lexical replacements and since many social or political terms simply are nonexistent in Hindi, it becomes a reason for intensified Sanskritization of language,⁵⁵ i.e. introducing Sanskrit words (so-called *tatsama*-s) and derivatives formed according to the rules of Sanskrit word-formation. Modi is not reluctant to do so, and in his speeches he readily employs necessary Sanskrit neologisms, as well as the Sanskrit words that admittedly belong to the Hindi vocabulary, but have their more common (and, probably, also more widely understandable) counterparts. A good example is

fact that one of the webpage versions has been created in Sanskrit which, actually, is a non-regional language (although, since 2010 it has a status of a second official language in the state of Uttarakhand), with a number of self reported speakers around 14,000 as per the 2011 census. In the Indian context this is a meaningless bit of population (and potential voters), therefore, the creation of a webpage in Sanskrit can be seen only as a purely ideological move which aims to highlight and corroborate Modi's references to 'magnificent Indian Sanskritic' tradition. On the other hand, it is clear that Modi's political ideology is subordinated to his pragmatic approach, which is certified by the lack of a webpage in Bengali, after Hindi the second Indian language in terms of number of users (approx. 83 million). Modi knows that BJP has no chance in the states of West Bengal and Tripura, and probably acknowledged that the webpage in Bengali would be only unnecessary waste of resources and effort. He did not visit these states during his election campaign either.

⁵⁵ Linguistic Sanskritization obviously is a manifestation of the wider dimension of Sanskritization, understood in terms of complex sociological or anthropological phenomenon. This practice was defined for the first time in the fifties of the last century, by M.N. Srinivas, as "the process in which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal, or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born caste'..." (M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Hyderabad 1995, p. 6). Since the phenomenon of Sanskritization corresponds well with the Hindu-centric ideology of BJP, the party, trying to broaden its electoral appeal, has adopted Sanskritization hotfoot as a tool for reaching out to Dalit, Other Backward Castes, and tribal groups.

a Sanskrit word *nārī* “woman”, which Modi uses most willingly, even though there are at least three other, more widespread words of the same meaning. Such practice without a doubt is meant to emphasize Modi’s (and BJP’s) esteem for the great Sanskritic tradition – but the other side of the coin is again pragmatic: more difficult Sanskrit expressions which might be unclear, or completely incomprehensible for the audience, are duplicated by their more common, “more Hindi than Sanskrit” equivalents, as in the following sentence:

indradhanuṣ kā pahlā raṅg hai hamārī kuṭumb prathā, hamārī parivār vyavasthā

‘The first colour of the rainbow is our family [Sanskrit: *kuṭumb*] tradition, our family [Hindi: *parivār*] system.’

Accused repeatedly of spreading the “saffron terror,”⁵⁶ BJP over the years has made considerable efforts to abdicate open identity politics in favour of good governance as an instrument to gain (and remain in) power – and these efforts are clearly seen in its electoral rhetoric. The word “Hindu” would no more be found in Modi’s speeches, nor will be the name of any religion. He has been extra cautious in not trying to alter the popular mood of the electorate, and often makes an appeal not to vote on caste or religious lines, focusing on economy as a central election discourse. However, a study of Modi’s speeches reveals that the collective symbols employed to convey his social, political and economic ideas are very deeply rooted in Hindu tradition and obviously evoke strong associations with Hindu nationalism. Moreover, he never employs any symbols or connotations connected with other traditions of India, but the Hindu tradition. Modi’s modernist slogans and statements, referring to non-religious spheres of life are supported by quotations from the Hindu religious texts – like *Ṛgveda*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Upaniṣad*-s, *Manusmṛiti*, popular Hindu *bhajan*-s, writings of spiritual leaders, like Vivekananda or Osho, etc.⁵⁷

They say that he has “a vision so well articulated that it aligns an entire state on the path of progress, thoughts so insightful that they captivate the listener in an unrelenting hold, words so compelling that they inspire each one to take action –

⁵⁶ Acts of violence that have been described as being motivated by Hindu Nationalism. The term appeared for the first time in 2002, in connection to a three-day period of inter-communal violence in the state of Gujarat (known as the Gujarat riots) and has been spread widely after 29 September 2008 bomb blast in the predominantly Muslim town of Malegaon in Maharashtra.

⁵⁷ *Ṛgveda* – ancient Indian sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns, counted among the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism known as the Vedas; *Mahābhārata* – one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, containing philosophical and devotional material; *Rāmāyaṇa* – one of the great Hindu epics, portraying ideal characters (like the ideal king, the ideal wife, etc.); *Upaniṣads* – a collection of Vedic texts which contains the earliest emergence of some of the central religious and philosophical concepts of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism; *Manusmṛiti* – the most important and earliest metrical work concerning Hindu religious and legal duty; *bhajans* – popular Hindu devotional songs; Osho (1931-1990) – Indian mystic, guru and spiritual teacher, in his discourses he reinterpreted the writings of religious traditions, mystics and philosophers from around the world.

that is the power of his speeches.”⁵⁸ And the source of this power still remains the consistency in Modi’s actions, which has its roots in the unshakable, constant, and invariable Hindu nationalism.

Conclusion

This attempt to describe the means of communication most frequently used by Narendra Modi – with a general aim to revealing the consistency in his appearances and his ability to keep the fine balance between modernity and tradition – leads us to several conclusions.

It shows clearly that this politician is most certainly trying to appeal to all the senses of the public. With colours, scenography and choreography he addresses the eyes. With the selection of keywords and collective symbols in his speeches, and also by the modulation of his voice – he reaches the ears of the crowds of possible voters. His choices of means are made carefully, as are the projected associations to be adduced, the associations which, as this study implies, refer to a set of general culture-based values that appear relevant for modern-day Indian political culture.

A number of studies have already attempted to define culture; however, it is Clyde Kluckhohn’s anthropological concept, which suggests that “the essential *core* of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values.”⁵⁹ Also, for the purpose of this article, the national “core values” distinguished by Jerzy J. Smolicz as the fundamental elements of culture are appropriate, because of their ability to act as identifying values that are symbolic of a group and its membership.

According to Smolicz, the identification of core values can be most clearly discerned when the group is threatened and needs to defend its culture against external pressures.⁶⁰ In the Indian context the election campaign is certainly a circumstance of such nature; therefore, it creates a natural opportunity to set out and re-define or re-awaken the community’s core values. In the specific case of Indian elections that take place in such a diverse society, what BJP tries to achieve, also through the actions of their PM candidate, does not seem to be done by a unified *political* culture but by a dominant *national* culture manifesting certain “core values” and perceptions of tradition that are presumably shared by the majority of the population.

One of the core values central to the BJP political discourse is *nationalism*, the other equally important one is *religion*. Narendra Modi clearly fashions himself as a living personification of both. He expresses it most plainly in numerous speeches

⁵⁸ N. Modi, “Speeches to read”, [on line] <http://www.narendramodi.in/category/speeches/>, May 1, 2014.

⁵⁹ C. Kluckhohn, “The Study of Culture”, [in:] *The Policy Sciences*, D. Lerner, H.D. Lasswell [eds.], Stanford, CA 1951, p. 85.

⁶⁰ J.J. Smolicz, “Core Values and Culture Identity”, [in:] *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1981, no. 43(1), p. 75-90.

and interviews. It has also been put in black and white on his election posters, which bring a definite message: “I am Hindu Nationalist” and “I am Patriot, I am Nationalist, I am Born Hindu” (cf. pictures 12-13).

However, the fine balance that Modi is quite successfully gaining is based on a mixed communication. On the one hand, the public sees him as the protector of tradition; on the other, he manages to come across as a voice of modernity. He achieves this goal by being able to create his own original code that includes a measure of internationally employed expressions and gestures mixed with the typical Indian (Hindu?) ones. What we can read out from his message has been clearly explained in one of his interviews:

[Q:] People want to know who is the real Modi – Hindu nationalist leader or pro-business chief minister?

[A:] I’m nationalist. I’m patriotic. Nothing is wrong. I’m a born Hindu. Nothing is wrong. So, I’m a Hindu nationalist so yes, you can say I’m a Hindu nationalist because I’m a born Hindu. I’m patriotic so nothing is wrong in it. As far as progressive, development-oriented, workaholic, whatever they say, this is what they are saying. So there’s no contradiction between the two. It’s one and the same image.⁶¹

In his seminal work *The Nature of Human Values*, Milton Rokeach states that the language of values is “language designed to appeal to others in order to persuade them to share one’s own viewpoint and to engage in supportive political action.”⁶² These words seem to resonate with the ancient text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, advising the “wise people” to act accordingly “when different occasions or times present themselves.” As if to prove both these statements, and to fit our times, the surname of the traditional Hindu, who defines himself as nationalist, is used in a word-play created in English – the language of “modern” India. The slogan reads: “India needs MODification.” Perhaps it would then be appropriate to state that in the case of Narendra Modi’s appearances, we have to deal with tradition that for the purposes of the campaign has been carefully MODified according to the MODish principles. And through such a procedure a symbolic image of a single man who embodies both tradition and modernity has been successfully created.

Epilogue

On the 26th May 2014, Narendra Modi took oath as the Prime Minister of India, in result of apparently the largest election in the history of the world, in which – according to the Election Commission of India – 814.5 million people were eligible to vote.

⁶¹ Narendra Modi interviewed for Reuters by Ross Colvin and Sruthi Gottipati, July 12, 2013, [on line] <http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2013/07/12/interview-with-bjp-leader-narendra-modi/>, April 26, 2014.

⁶² M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values*, New York 1973, p. 168.

Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party won 31.0% of all votes and 282 (51.9%) of all seats in Lok Sabha, whereas the National Democratic Alliance (led by the BJP) won in total 336 Lok Sabha seats and is therefore able to govern without having to form any further coalitions. Thus, it is justified to state that perhaps one the most spectacular election campaigns ever organised in India, and prepared on the highest level of PR professionalism, won for the BJP and its allies the right to form the largest majority government since the 1984 general election.

However, after the indisputable victory, the time came now when the general public is able to notice the dissonance between election slogans and promises and every-day actions. In his recent book Shashi Tharur gives a competent insight of Modi's and his government undertakings, stating that

Modi has built his appeal by putting the focus on what the Indian people manifestly need – more development, better governance, wider socio-economic opportunities. But having won an election by attracting voters to these themes, he has given free rein to the most retrograde elements in Indian society, who are busy rewriting textbooks, extolling the virtues of ancient science over modern technology, advocating protectionism and self-reliance against free trade and foreign investment, and asserting that India's identity must be purely Hindu.⁶³

On the other hand, an attempt to assess the Prime Minister's actions from the point of his symbolic behaviour, makes it possible to conclude that his policy since taking the office confirms all that could have been read from the symbolism of his election campaign in the most consistent manner. The achievements of the first few months of his term in the office – that prove Modi to be an orthodox Hindu – might again bring about a paradoxical association (already pointed out by Harbans Mukhia in 2013) with the most orthodox Muslim ruler of the 17th century India, the emperor Aurangzeb⁶⁴. This seemingly absurd parallel becomes shockingly convincing while read on the level of Modi's symbolic behaviour.

Narendra Damodardas Modi was born on 17 September 1950, in Vadnagar, situated in Mehsana district in the state of Gujarat. He completed his schooling in Vadnagar and afterwards he earned his Master's Degree in Political Science from Gujarat University.

Modi's involvement with politics started already in his student years, when he was a *pracārak* (voluntary agitator) in the RSS. In 1987, Modi joined the Bharatiya

⁶³ S. Tharur, *India Shastra. Reflections on the Nation in Our Time*, New Delhi 2015, p. XV.

⁶⁴ See: H. Mukhia, *Narendra Modi. A Modern Parallel of the Ruthlessly Ambitious Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb*, [on line] http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-12/news/43980943_1_aurangzeb-narendra-modi-dara-shikoh, February 5, 2015.

Janata Party. Just within a year, he was elevated to the level of General Secretary of the Gujarat unit. In 1995, he was appointed the National Secretary of the party and given the charge of five major states. In 1998, he was appointed the General Secretary of the BJP, a post he held until October 2001. In October 2001 Narendra Modi became the Chief Minister of Gujarat. He was re-elected in December 2002 and again in December 2007. The same decision was repeated by the voters in December 2012, and he was sworn as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for the fourth time. Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, was declared as a Prime Minister candidate on 13th September 2013.

Apart from being a politician, Narendra Modi is also a poet and has a few books of verse to his credit. His private life became the focal point of public interest when it has been proved that this declared and adamant bachelor has a wife whom, according to one version of the story, he married when he was in his teens, and to another, that they were married in their early childhood. Both the versions claim that the marriage was never consummated. Narendra Modi had not, until now, uttered even a single word of explanation on the matter.



8-9. Modi's prevailing colours are light orange, yellow and white.

Source: [on line] <http://forbesindia.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Narendra-Modi-300x400.jpg>, May 2, 2014. Source: [on line] <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshowpics/msid-2578653,prtpage-1.cms>, May 2, 2014



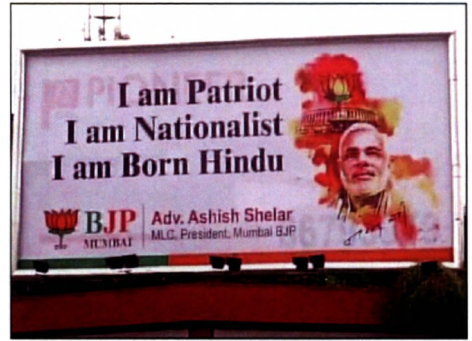
10. Narendra Modi speaking from an open lotus flower.

Source: [on line] http://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/dynamic/01761/19TH_NARENDRA_MODI_1761895f.jpg, May 2, 2014



11. Narendra Modi with folded arms – ready for the victory to come.

Source: [on line] <http://pakteahouse.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/modi321.jpg>, May 2, 2014



12-13. Unequivocal manifestations on Modi's election posters.

Source: [on line] http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-07-18/news/40657377_1_hindu-nationalist-poll-campaign-narendra-modi, May 2, 2014; <https://plus.google.com/+NDTV/posts/hbz7p3822SX>, May 2, 2014



14. Narendra Modi – a man of many images.

Source: [on line] <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=223476574526947&set=a.171010033106935.1073741834.168258900048715&type=1&theater>, May 2, 2014